A New Era of Transatlantic Friendship

During the 45th edition of the Munich Security Conference, French President Sarkozy delivered a speech in an joint appearance with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk. Mr. Sarkozy characterized the new century as an emergence of several "relative powers," which requires an increased cooperation and solidarity between nations to respond to the challenges of security and to find solutions to the conflicts worldwide. To that end, he emphasized the importance of the friendship between France and the United States, in a common goal of securing freedom in the world.

Describing the role of NATO as a "family" grounded on shared values, President Sarkozy noted that membership involves responsibility and solicited "sharing the burden." The President's remark reflected the engagement of France to retrieve a full role within NATO's integrated military command, by shouldering responsibilities and renewing its commitment toward the Alliance. The French president observed that "the renewal of the relationship between France and NATO will benefit the Alliance, Europe, and France." Referring to the complex history of France's links to the Atlantic Alliance, and to assuage any concerns about France's new role, Mr. Sarkozy asserted that "the alliance of the United States and of Europe does not threaten the independence of [France], but strengthens it."

The president advocated the reinforcement of the Joint European Defense capacity, arguing that the transatlantic partnership needs a strong Europe. Indeed, Europe wants peace, and not "to be left in peace." This requires a strategy, a policy, and a determination "to exist as an economic, financial, political and military power." This conviction was also expressed by the President's pledge to "renew its defense and security policy." France will thereby allocate 377 billion euros to the renovation of its army. It will also maintain its nuclear power in close cooperation with the British.

In addition, President Sarkozy called for a restoration of confidence with Russia, mentioning that it is not a military threat to the security of the West and must, in a broader future, be integrated in a "common economic and human area."

Mr. Sarkozy's speech preceded US Vice President Joe Biden's endorsement of France's new responsibilities within the context of NATO, which, he said, set the basis of a new Transatlantic dialogue that is "warmly welcome[d]."

A Season of French Ministerial Visits to the U.S.

Eager to begin working with their new American counterparts, French ministers have been traveling to Washington, D.C., over the last two months to meet their homologues and discuss areas of mutual interest. United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton welcomed French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner to the nation's capital on February 5. After private discussions, Secretary Clinton and Minister Kouchner held a joint press conference in the 'Treaty Room of the White House. Secretary Clinton affirmed the importance of the transatlantic alliance that is "one of the oldest and closest that the United States has in the world." Mr. Kouchner echoed the enduring French-American camaraderie, stating that the relationship is "a very sound friendship [...] an old friendship [...] that has a lot of future to it."

Secretary Clinton and Minister Kouchner described the US-France partnership as essential to addressing areas of common interest, notably the situations in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Darfur, the closing of Guantanamo prison, and "the never-ending pursuit of a just and secure peace between Israelis and Palestinians." Both cited Gaza and Iran as regions that necessitate cooperation. Similarly, both emphasized the importance of success in Afghanistan for securing a foundation for democratic progress in the region.

French Finance Minister Christine Lagarde also traveled to Washington, D.C. On February 19, she met with her US counterpart, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner to discuss both nations' strategies in dealing with domestic and international economies in the wake of the global financial crisis. After their meeting, Secretary Lagarde held a press conference where she summarized their "friendly and productive" dialogue and their detailed and thorough discussion about both countries' stimulus plans. The meeting emphasized financial stability, the importance of avoiding protectionism, and the need for more transparent banking regulations. She noted that France and the United States are in agreement when it comes to regulating hedge funds and business executive compensation.

Earlier last month, French Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries Michel Barnier met with his American counterpart, Tom Vilsack, to discuss issues ranging from sustainable and environmentally-friendly development, ecological security, and importation regulations.

This month, French Defense Minister Hervé Morin visited the United States for two days. On March 2, he delivered an address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies on the topics of NATO and Afghanistan, and later met with National Security Adviser James L. Jones to discuss the current situation in Afghanistan. During a ceremony held at the French Embassy, he awarded the French Legion of Honor to three Americans: General Frances C. Wilson, president of the National Defense University; and Mortimer Caplin and James Fletcher, two American veterans of World War II. The following day, Mr. Morin met with President Obama's special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and Senator John McCain.

Fans of Facebook Connect with France

The Embassy of France in the U.S. would like to take its "friendship" with the readers of News From France to the next level by inviting them to become a fan of ours on Facebook.

While nothing could replace the individual relationships we have with our readers, connecting through Facebook is an innovate way for the embassy to preserve the centuries-old alliance with Americans and to create a new forum in which we can meet and interact.

Fans will receive updates on events taking place at the embassy as well as news on the latest developments in French-American relations. Additionally, all Facebook fans will be invited to an annual celebration in their honor at the embassy — more details to follow on Facebook. To find us, please search "French Embassy in the US" on the site's browser.
### Discovering the Latest Trends in Tourism in France

La Maison de la France hosted the third in a series of nine luncheons across the nation to discuss tourism trends in France with travel specialists and journalists on February 12, at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, in Washington, D.C. From navigating France’s enchanting Canal du Midi to skiing in the unparalleled splendor of the French Alps, France’s plethora of activities and led splendor of France, especially, are among those who highlighted the strategic plan to reinvigorate France’s tourism industry. A new logo for French tourism was unveiled at the luncheon.

As part of “Destination France 2020,” the new logo for French tourism was unveiled at the luncheon. The image features a beautiful, forward-looking young woman above the tagline “Rendez-Vous en France.” The new emblem is designed to convey the liberty, authenticity, and sensuality that, in 2007, brought 82 million visitors to France.

For more information on activities in or traveling to France, please visit: www.franceguide.com.

### French Commandos Intercept Drug Shipment

French commandos based on the frigate Le Ventôse intercepted a high-speed “go-fast” boat near the Colombia-Venezuela border on the night of February 9, recovering approximately 650 kilograms of cocaine. The operation was executed under the tactical command of the United States’ Joint Interagency Task Force (JIATF) and resulted in the arrest of six people, who were immediately transported to Fort-de-France to face legal proceedings.

Le Ventôse was assigned to the case that morning, after information acquired by the JIATF raised suspicions of an impending go-fast boat departure from the Guajira Peninsula, the northernmost peninsula in South America. A team of commandos was launched when the frigate’s Panther helicopter spotted a go-fast boat with its night vision on the first patrol of the evening. As the Canadian frigate HMCS Montreal blocked a possible escape path, the French commandos fired disabling shots at the speedboat’s engine and then boarded, confiscating drugs and trafficking equipment, making arrests, and ultimately sinking the craft to prevent further illegal use.

Le Ventôse’s victory came at a time when bad weather had been inhibiting the success of its missions. Operating under the orders of the prefect of Martinique, the frigate had cast off from Cozumel on February 2 and entered the tactical command structure of the JIATF, a task force within U.S. Southern Command devoted to counter-narcotics missions.

### Around the World in Eighty-Four Days

On February 1, after 84 days, three hours, and nine minutes at sea, Frenchman Michel Desjoyeaux won the Vendée Globe, the only single-handed, non-stop, around-the-world sailing competition. His incredible feat set a world record for time and made him the only person to win the competition twice. French President Nicolas Sarkozy commended the two-time champion, saying “Desjoyeaux, with this extraordinary new victory, confirms his status as the most decorated solo sailor.”

Desjoyeaux crossed the finish line at Les Sables d’Olonne on the French Atlantic coast after a grueling race few thought he could win. This sixth edition of the quadrennial competition was one of the toughest — 17 of the 30 original seafarers never completed the odyssey. Desjoyeaux’s voyage had an especially trying start when leaking ballast tanks on his 60-foot carbon-fiber keelboat forced him back to port fewer than 200 miles into his journey. When he reembarked on November 11, Desjoyeaux was already 40 hours and nearly 400 miles behind schedule, and had to constantly adjust course to avoid the threat of icebergs. In the end, Desjoyeaux won the arduous competition after sailing over 28,000 miles — 1,160 more than the previous record-holder.

Desjoyeaux, who has studied engineering and created innovations in sailing technology, has sailing in his blood. He grew up in Port La Forêt, known as “the valley of the madmen” for the number of solo sailors living there, where his father established a sailing school and his brother, who has built most of Desjoyeaux’s yachts, manages a boatyard. Desjoyeaux’s previous victories include the transatlantic races Transat in 2004 and Route du Rhum in 2002, as well as three wins of the Solitaire du Figaro single-handed competition.

### German Battalion Sets Up House in France

German Minister of Defense Hervé Morin announced at the recent NATO meeting in Munich that a 600- to 700-strong German battalion is going to set up house in Illkirch-Graffenstaden, south of Strasbourg, France. This unit is part of the French-German Brigade created in October 1989. This brigade’s presence marks the first time since 1945 that a German unit will be posted on French soil, and its establishment is highly symbolic, as it will be stationed at the crossroads of French-German relations: the Leclerc quarters, located less than three miles from the French-German border marked by the Rhine river. The German battalion will replace a French unit — the 1st Engineer Battalion — that is scheduled for disbandment in 2010.

The German battalion will include two infantry companies; a reconnaissance company, as well as an infantry company and staff.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy declared that France will be delighted and honored to welcome the German battalion on its territory, labelling this move “a historical act” that highlights the friendship between the two countries.
French-American Cooperation: Accelerating Energy Solutions

Amping up its electric-vehicle strategy, Ford Motor Company announced on February 3 that Johnson Controls-Saft, a joint US-French venture, will supply batteries for its first production plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV). Johnson Controls-Saft, already a battery supplier for Mercedes-Benz and BMW hybrid vehicles, will produce lithium-ion battery systems that yield 120 miles per gallon. The electricity provided will subsid for 30-40 miles before a car taps into its gasoline-powered engine.

The Johnson Controls-Saft company contracted a five-year deal with Ford, where they will manufacture the batteries in France and assemble the battery system in the United States. Johnson Controls Power Solutions president, Alex Molinaroli, applauded the agreement, stating that, "As the United States works to build a manufacturing infrastructure and supply base for hybrid and electric vehicles, this contract signals significant progress for our industry here." The accord combines Johnson Controls’ strong American presence as the largest maker of automotive batteries with the expertise of the French corporation Saft in battery technology and energy solutions.

The lithium-ion battery system designed and manufactured by Johnson Controls-Saft includes cells, mechanical, electronic, and thermal components. The five-year supply is intended for a target of 5,000 plug-in hybrid vehicles to be released each year, starting in 2012. "The battery is a critical piece of electrifying vehicles," commented Nancy Gioia, Ford director of Sustainable Mobility Technologies and Hybrid Vehicle Programs, "Johnson Controls-Saft is one of the leaders focused on creating lithium-ion batteries for an affordable new generation of vehicles."

French-American Cooperation: Accelerating Energy Solutions

Agnès Varda Visits Boston

The French Consulate of Boston partnered with the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University to present the first exhibition in the United States of French artist and filmmaker Agnès Varda’s recent work in video installation art running from March 12 - April 12.

Agnès Varda is known as one the world’s greatest film directors. Her first feature film, “La Pointe-courte” (1954), was a key precursor to the French New Wave. Her latest film, “Les Plages d’Agnès” (2008), premiered at the Venice Film Festival last September.

Agnès Varda’s long career took a new turn when she made her first video installation in 2003, “Pintatopia,” selected for the 2003 Venice Biennial. This exhibition should grant her work as an installation artist greater visibility in the U.S.

From this perspective, the Carpenter Center will present "The Widows of Noirmoutier," a video installation created in 2004 that features women in black on the beach, surrounded by 14 short video profiles. It is a powerful work about widowhood and mourning, the personal and the collective as well as virtual and actual temporalities and spaces.

Agnès Varda is the second French artist, following Pierre Huyghe, to be given the honor of having an exhibition at the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.

During her stay, Varda will also give a public lecture and hold master classes devoted to her work, in conjunction with an important retrospective of her films at the Harvard Film Archive.

For more information on the exhibit, please visit: http://hc.harvard.edu/hfa.

French Aerospace Company’s Big Screen Performance Takes Off

France’s Ariane 5 launch vehicle made its screen debut at this year’s Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, where it had a supporting role in the ad-industry documentary "Art & Copy."

While the film is a documentary featuring the exploits of advertising legends like Hal Riney and Lee Clow, an Ariane 5 launch vehicle was threaded into the film as a subtext to the overarching story. The film showcases an Ariane 5 launch campaign, beginning with the arrival of the satellites, final preparation and the rollout of the vehicles, culminating with the launch.

Just as a launch campaign at Europe’s spaceport in French Guiana ultimately injects new constellations into the heavens, so do effective advertising and publicity campaigns place new ideas into the cultural firmament. The 88-minute film tells the history of the genesis of now-famous advertising campaigns — like Nike’s “Just Do it” slogan or Apple’s “1984” Super bowl spot — and the heroic struggles that visionary ad-men and women had to make in order for these ads to, like the Ariane 5, take off. Offering insight into inner workings of the commercial side of the satellite communications industry, ArianeSpace Chairman and CEO Jean-Yves Le Gall discusses how advertisements make satellite constellations possible — ad revenues allow for more satellites to be purchased, built, and launched.

The documentary’s behind-the-scenes look into the advertising industry is particularly timely, as its debut coincides with an economy where advertising budgets industry-wide are under reconsideration. Yet its narrative has generated interest throughout the film industry — in addition to being picked up by distributor Art House Films, film legend Robert Redford expressed great enthusiasm for the documentary following its Sundance debut; one of the few screenings the actor/director reportedly attended during the festival.

French Playwright Takes the Stage at Emory University

Famed French playwright Valère Novarina was invited to Atlanta this year to lead a series of workshops at Emory University. Supported by the French Cultural Services and HighTower Funds, the series provided a forum for Novarina to discuss his original work as well as the process of adapting an original text into theater or cinema. The workshops included a screening of the Raphaël O’Byrne film adapted from Novarina’s text “What Cannot Be Spoken Is What Must Be Said,” a discussion and Q&A with Novarina concerning the film, a staged reading of texts by Novarina in both English and French, and a round table discussion with Novarina, Valéry Warnotte and Le Théâtre du Rêve regarding its 2010 production of a Novarina piece. In theater, Novarina is acclaimed as one of France’s leading playwrights, with works regularly produced for the French Festival d’Avignon and Le Festival d’Automne.

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Nuclear Power in France

The oil crisis of 1973 encouraged France to pursue energy independence. Fearing “no oil, no gas, no coal, no choice,” France decided to invest in nuclear energy, a compact energy source that only required a few annual pounds of uranium to power an entire city. Over the next 15 years, France introduced the most comprehensive nuclear energy program in history, eventually installing 58 industrial-sized nuclear pressurized water reactors (PWR) at 19 sites throughout the hexagon.

All the PWRs in France are Generation II reactors, meaning they have enhanced safety features and improved energy efficiency over previous models. These power plants have three essential components—a reactor, a steam generator and a condenser. In the reactor, uranium atoms are split in a chain reaction that releases heat. Water in the steam generator is then heated and vapors turn massive turbines that generate electrical currents. A condenser containing a constant stream of cold water cools the steam, allowing the cycle to continue. PWRs differ from other nuclear reactors because the water in the condenser is under very high pressure—effectively increasing heat absorption from the steam generator and modulating the temperature of the nuclear reactor within an appropriate range.

Operated by an energy integrated utility, EDF, nuclear energy currently supplies France with nearly 80 percent of its electricity needs, generating 63 GW or 63,000,000,000 units of energy (Joules) per second. Because France enjoys some of the lowest energy costs in Europe, EDF is also one of the world’s largest net exporters of electrical power, annually sending up to 60 billion kilowatt hours to neighboring countries like Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

Thanks in large part to nuclear energy, France also enjoys the highest air quality in Europe because the sole daily byproduct of nuclear energy plants is steam and heated water. In fact, during the 1980s as France tripled its nuclear energy capacity, the total pollution from the country’s energy system dropped by 80 to 90 percent. The impact goes beyond France, as well: the use of nuclear energy over fossil fuels has reduced worldwide emission of carbon dioxide by 1,600 tons annually—an 8 percent reduction of yearly gas emission.

France has also developed a novel approach to deal with spent fuel that is unable to sustain nuclear reactions after extended use. Spent fuel can be either sequestered deep in the earth or, as practiced in France, recycled for future power generation. EDF sends about 70 percent of France’s yearly spent fuel to be reprocessed at the La Hague Plant on the coast of Normandy, where it is cooled in large pools of water for 5 years before being extracted for 99.9 percent of its viable uranium and plutonium. The economical process saves up to 30 percent of the resources that would have otherwise been required. Ultimate waste is vitrified, presently stored in two small buildings in La Hague awaiting final disposal.

In addition, there have been no accidents at any French nuclear plant since the technology began powering the country’s grid nearly 40 years ago. The Nuclear Safety Authority (ASN) is an independent body of five commissioners established in 2006. The ASN is tasked, on behalf of the state, with regulating nuclear safety and radiation protection in order to protect workers, patients, the public and the environment from the risks involved in nuclear activities.

Future

France has benefited immensely from fusion and is still studying fourth generation new fusion models, to be deployed from 2040. However, it also sees its future in fusion. The European Union joined the United States, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation in signing an agreement at the Elsysce Palace in 2006 establishing the international organization currently implementing the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) energy project. ITER, the world’s largest international scientific partnership, aims to provide a new, safe energy source, via fusion energy. If successful, fusion will be used to supply almost unlimited energy, without the risk of accident or the production of long-life radioactive waste, such as plutonium, or the release of greenhouse gases.

Fusion energy—commonly called “star energy”—is produced by nuclear reactions, which, in matter in the plasma state, enable the sun and stars to emit light and heat. Unlike nuclear fission, used in present nuclear power stations, the fusion process consists of fusing hydrogen isotopes in a chamber governed by powerful magnetic fields. Fusion uses elements which are available in practically inexhaustible abundance (deuterium and lithium, present in seawater, in particular) but to start such a reaction, a temperature of 100 million degrees is necessary.

ITER will take on this promethean challenge by providing first for the construction, then operation, of an international thermonuclear reactor at Cadarache, in the south of France. The goal is to demonstrate the possibility of controlling the nuclear fusion reactions working at the core of the sun through a controlled fusion reaction lasting 400 seconds. If the experiment proves to be a successful model of generating electricity through nuclear fusion, it should be succeeded in about 2025 by the construction of Demo, a demonstration reactor, finally generating electricity, followed then by an industrial reactor. Former French president Jacques Chirac, present at the inception of ITER, commented on the world-changing possibilities of the project. “It is our duty to undertake the research that will prepare energy solutions for our descendants. This major scientific project is [...] the hand held out to future generations, in the name of solidarity and responsibility.”
France Discovers Earth-Like Planet

A mission led by the French Space Agency (CINES), in conjunction with the European Space Agency (ESA) and international partners, announced the discovery of the smallest terrestrial planet ever detected outside the Solar System on February 3. The scientists named the planet "CoRoT-Exo-7b," after the CoRoT telescope—an acronym for planetary convection, rotation, and transit—that discovered it. Launched into orbit in 2006, the CoRoT telescope detects changes in the brightness of nearby stars, and serves to search for exoplanets and study stellar interiors (See NFF 07.01). Of roughly 330 exoplanets thus far discovered, most are gas giants similar to Jupiter or Neptune. The planet CoRoT-Exo-7b has a size and surface comparable to Earth, explains CoRoT Project Scientist Malcolm Fridlund: "For the first time, we have unambiguously detected a planet that is 'rocky' in the same sense as our own Earth."

The newly discovered planet orbits a nearby star in the same way that Earth revolves around the Sun. However, CoRoT-Exo-7b completes an orbit every twenty hours, making its "year" less than one Earth day, and its temperature hovers between 1,800°F and 2,700° F. While the internal structure puzzles scientists, Fridlund asserts, "The discovery is a very important step on the road to understanding the formation and evolution of our planet."

Quantifying the mass of terrestrial planets has proved difficult in the past, but the CoRoT telescope is able to directly measure the size of the surface. Astronomers used the telescope to detect the planet whose star is 457 light-years away from Earth, "as it transited its parent star, dimming the light from the star as it passed in front of it," explained the European Space Agency.

Robotic Arm Lends Helping Hand to Far-Off Patients

Hundreds of miles may no longer keep a patient from an expert sonographer, thanks to a robotic tele-echography service that French and European space agencies, CINES and ESA respectively, began testing last month. Known as the ARTIS project (Advanced Robotic Tele-echography Integrated Service), the system is expected to specifically benefit smaller, often under-staffed hospitals by enabling ultrasounds to be performed on patients remotely, using a robotic arm. Furthermore, the technology has the potential to increase efficiency and cut costs by avoiding systematically transferring patients to larger hospitals. Teleoperated scanners may be deployed at pilot sites in the coming months, and pending positive results, the service may even be installed in remote villages in Africa and South America.

The cutting-edge technology originated with research done by Professor Philippe Arbelè at Tours Hospital in France. In 2003, TERESA, the first robotic tele-echography arm was created. Today, ESA and CINES are attempting to take the system further. "There's a huge difference between a one-day technological demonstration and setting up a pre-operation service designed to run for several months, and this project is attempting to make that leap," explains Didier Schmitt, ARTIS Project Manager at ESA.

For more information, please visit: www.cnes.fr.

Paris Agricultural Show Offers Food for Thought

This year's Agricultural Show transformed the City of Light into an arena for sustainable agriculture solutions. Held at the Porte de Versailles Exhibition Center in Paris from February 21 - March 1, the show featured exhibitions devoted to gardening, environmentally-friendly housing, and new energy sources, among others. The agriculture show also featured the third annual "Tech for Food" forum on new technology initiatives to support agricultural development and food security in developing countries.

"Tech for Food" was the first international forum of its kind, offering an environment to discuss and launch technological initiatives that will advance the agriculture industry and boost food production in developing countries. "Tech for Food" organizer Jean-Paul Hebrard explains the connection between information technology networks and agriculture saying that, "The internet, mobile telephony, GPS, remote sensing; all these cutting edge technologies can help agricultural development and food security in developing countries."

The forum named India as its 2009 Guest of Honor, recognizing the country’s cutting edge contributions to sustainable technology. The forum also served as an opportunity to launch new technological initiatives, such as Nokia Life Tools, a service developed in India that allows farmers to check weather conditions and market prices on their cells phones. Through such innovations, "Tech for Food" hopes to optimize harvest yields and incomes of farmers. This year, the show expected 600,000 visitors and 1,000 exhibitors around the world.
News from France

A new initiative has been passed to grant French teenagers a free year-long newspaper subscription in hopes of encouraging an interest in reading and intellectual curiosity. Through the initiative, French youth will receive a newspaper subscription of their choice when they turn 18.

A Call to Establish New Area Codes

It is no secret that cell phone use has become omnipresent, but in France, where nearly 90 percent of the population owns a cell phone, French phone line authority l’ARCEP is creating an addition area code to accommodate heavy cell phone use. Jean-Claude Mallet, the president of l’ARCEP, announced that as of 2010, cell phone number combinations will begin with area code 07 due to the increased demand for cell phone numbers. Only 10 million out of 100 million 06-area code combinations are currently available for public cell phone use, and the demand for new combinations continues to increase every day. Jean Françoise-Fernandez, a representative of l’ARCEP explained that, “beyond the people getting more cell phones, the need for new phone numbers comes from the machine-to-machine business.”

National Diploma for Professional Dance

The French Ministry of Culture recently announced that France will be adopting a national diploma for professional dance. Six professional dance schools in France will begin to award the diploma this year, pending verification from the Paris School of Dance and Opera. In the past, French dance academies have believed that the skills to perform well in an audition were enough to succeed in the dance world. However, now that other countries are beginning to itemize talent with a diploma, the academies have also introduced a nationalized degree.

Though it has taken the French a few years to adopt the concept of a nationalized dance degree, the diploma offers many benefits. One of the largest advantages is that a diploma will unify the various teaching methods offered by dance academies. Mr. Frédéric Moreau, Director of Music, Dance, Theater, and Spectacles for the Ministry of Culture stresses that the goal of the diploma is not to implement a uniform method of instruction, but rather to offer a universal degree which will benefit dancers while still retaining the unique curriculum and culture of each school.

The diploma is intended to maintain dance as a profession in France by offering students a degree with worldwide recognition. As France continues to be one of the leading countries in dance education, the ministry hopes that a national diploma will be a vehicle for opening new academies, especially in emerging genres. By combining the National Diploma for Professional Dance with the already existing diversity within French dance academies, France can only continue to produce dancers of the highest distinction.

Comic Relief at the Louvre

Superheroes, villains and vigilantes running rampant throughout the Louvre?

For the first time ever, the renowned art museum in Paris is turning its artistic spotlight on comic strips by showcasing the work of five comic creators in “Small Design: The Louvre Invites Comics.” In collaboration with Futoparolis — one of France’s most prestigious publishers — the Louvre commissioned unique comic strips, or bandes dessinées, set in the famed museums. The original comic strip plates, sketches and prints created by participating artists will be displayed through April.

Unlike the typical stories of good forces fighting evil, these comics have unconventional plots signifying the evolution of the genre from childhood entertainment to a more adult expression. Glacial Period, a submission by Frenchman Nicolas de Crécy, is the story of alien archeologists exploring an abandoned and ice-covered earth the Shar Pei of its 18th-century revolutionary protagonist, remarking “My comic strip is done exclusively on a digital screen, there is no paper at all. We are in the 21st century of communication.”

The au courant will be happy to hear that Slate.fr, a French version of the US web site Slate.com, was launched in France by a group of French journalists this February. Although Slate.com will have a 15 percent stake in the site, Slate.fr will operate independently of its American counterpart. The site will offer translations of select Slate articles, alongside original French editorial pieces on health, culture, politics, and the economy, all infused with the same savvy, bold opinions that Slate is known to offer. Though operating under a staff of only eight, the site has attracted the support of 40 well-known contributors as well as highly acclaimed journalists, including founder Eric Leser and chairman of the site, Jean-Marie Colombani, both former writers for the French daily newspaper Le Monde.

In their debut column, the editors established, “We will analyze and comment news events with a rigorous, relevant, ironic, and at times provocative tone, which has been the signature and the success of Slate.com in the United States.” The editors hope to make it one of France’s most-visited sites for analysis and debate. “I’ve always been a fan of Slate and have believed for a long time that a French audience would gain from an online commentary site with the same cleverness, intellect and humor as Slate,” remarked Leser. “Slate has had an incredible impact on Web Journalism in the U.S., and I hope to achieve the same for France.”

The editors do not endorse the content, views and opinions of authors expressed in the aforementioned Web sites.
Harry Potter and the French Enchantment

French President Nicolas Sarkozy bestowed upon J.K. Rowling—writer of the famed Harry Potter series—the title of “knight” in the Legion of Honor at the Elysée Palace in early February. Mr. Sarkozy praised the writer for enchanting numerous French children with her stories: “Thanks to this internationally renowned saga, you have contributed to giving young people the taste for reading again.”

“Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix,” the fifth volume of the seven-part saga, became the first English-language book to top France’s best-sellers’ list in 2003 before its translation into French. Internationally renowned, the series has sold over 400 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 67 languages.

During her speech, Rowling joked with the audience and thanked them for not holding a grudge against her for using French name, Voldemort, for the series’ grand villain. “As a Francophile, I have always been proud of my French blood, but I needed a name that evokes both power and exoticism.”

This medal is the second Legion of Honor decorating Rowling’s family. Her great-grandfather, a Frenchman, received the award in 1924 for his participation in World War I at the Battle of Verdun.

A Global March for La Francophonie

A reception at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., kicked off the District’s 9th Annual Francophone Festival on February 25, launching “le Mois de la Francophonie” in honor of the 200 million French speakers in approximately 70 different countries worldwide. The festival aims to celebrate the meaning, culture, and diversity of Francophonic through international films, concerts, and children’s programs.

Distinguished guests at the opening ceremony included ambassadors and representatives from all regions of the Francophone community, many of whom showcased their unique cultures by wearing traditional dress.

The reception also honored Senator Mary L. Landrieu of Louisiana with the first ever “Grand Prix de la Francophonie,” an award designed to recognize an American public figure who demonstrates the promotion and development of the values of the Francophone world. Landrieu, whose work with the French Teaching Program CODOFIL illustrates her efforts to preserve French language and culture, highlighted her state’s pride in its French heritage: “We love French,” she declared, “we are proud of my French blood, but I was put to death after performing illegal marriage ceremonies when the institution of marriage was banned by the Roman Emperor. Legend holds that the brave saint actually wrote the first “valentine” himself, signing a goodbye love letter to his jailor’s sympathetic daughter "From your Valentine.”

Love Is in the Air in France

France’s reputation as an epicenter of romance comes to life on Valentine’s Day. While many French amoureux spend Le Jour de la St. Valentin like their friends across the Atlantic — exchanging flowers, sweets, and other tokens of affection — the truly smitten are able to take their loved ones to a town named after the patron saint of lovers. Saint Valentine, known as “the village of lovers,” is a picturesque town in Indre, located in central France that offers extraordinary events, from speed-dating to wedding vow renewals.

France’s love affair with Valentine’s Day itself is rooted in history. In fact, it was a Frenchman who sent the first known Valentine still in existence today; an impassioned poem written by Charles, Duke of Orléans to his wife in 1415, while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London. Valentine’s Day was later solidified as a celebration of love
"Romance of France" in Full Bloom

A stroll through the 16,000-square-foot flower garden based on Claude Monet’s living canvas — his personal estate — is the entrance for America’s largest home and garden show this year. A 20-acre indoor exhibition inspired by French charm and adventure was hosted at the I-X Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Celebrating “The Romance of France,” the Fifth Third Bank Home & Garden Show catered to hundreds of thousands of visitors at its 66th annual exhibition. To best illustrate the romantic joie de vivre for which France is renowned, organizers worked with members of the French-American Chamber of Commerce, Northern Ohio Chapter for over six months.

Set to the backdrop of a photographic montage of landmarks in France, an abundance of French attractions filled the lush exhibits of the show, and aisles marked with typical French street signs organized the layout. A 3,000-square foot French Boutique with retailers displayed French-American culture and its links with Northeastern Ohio. Local galleries featured French artwork, and French home goods companies — such as body care specialist L’Occitane en Provence — were highlighted as well. Pastry chefs and cooking competitions offered a true taste of France for attendees.

Among other features, Green Pavilion, 30 percent bigger and better this year, showcased 45 vendors with the most eco-conscious products on the market. Daily seminars featured experts from the construction, business, and government sectors. A 20,000-square-foot Home Idea Center put numerous indoor and outdoor living ideas in one house. The wealth of information and exhibits led the average guest to spend four to five hours promenading through the grounds.

Spotlight on Film Noir

Film noir is a cinematic genre seeped in desperate desire, lost innocence and doomed romanticism. In collaboration with the French Ministry of Culture and 98.1 Classical KING FM, the Seattle International Film Festival hosted "French Crime Wave 1937-1981," a series that featured 16 lesser-known French and American titles including, Henri-Georges Clouzot’s "Diabolique" as well as Luis Malle's "Elevator to the Gallows."

A rare work by famous French director François Truffaut includes "Shoot the Piano Player," the tragic love story of a waitress and a bar pianist with a criminal past. In "La Piscine," a couple’s poolside vacation turns fatal when a former lover shows up with an illegitimate daughter. "The Champagne Murders" follows a wine heir with amnesia as he tries to remember if he is responsible of a string of murders.

The rich content and intricate storylines in film noir is paired with aesthetic ingenuity influenced by expressionist cinema that uses highly stylized and theatrical scenes shot in simple black-and-white-tones. The genre originated in Hollywood and became an international phenomenon particularly in France, where directors produced films emphasizing themes of moral ambiguity and obsession.

"French Crime Wave" ran from January 16–February 5. For more information on the film series and for a full list of titles, please visit: www.siff.net.